

Friends Meeting House, Burford

Pytts Lane, Burford, Oxfordshire, OX18 4SJ

National Grid Reference: SP 25241 12093



Statement of Significance

A handsome stone-built early eighteenth-century meeting house, retaining its unusual internal gallery arrangement and many other historic features of note. The building makes a prominent and positive contribution to the Burford Conservation Area, and is of high evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.

Evidential value

The meeting house was built in the early eighteenth century and adapted later in that century. Since then it has been little altered, and retains an internal character redolent of a traditional meeting house. The site includes an attached burial ground. The building and site are of high evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house is over three centuries old, and there is a suggested but uncorroborated association with Edward Strong, Sir Christopher Wren's master mason at St Paul's. The building has passed out of Quaker use from time to time, but has undergone relatively little change. There is an attached burial ground. The building and site are of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The mellow Cotswold stone and roof tiles of the building, its architectural design and detailing, its group value in the townscape, its enclosed garden/burial ground and the relatively complete and little altered interior combine to give the building high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building and its facilities are used by the wider community as well as by Friends. The contribution that the building makes to the local conservation area adds to this high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Oxford & Swindon*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0000810*
- 1.3 Owner: *Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *West Oxfordshire District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Burford*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1266442*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Burford*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1708-9; c.1730; 1981*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *21 June 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *David Day, Nigel Braithwaite*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 496-7

Colvin, H., *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, fourth edition, 2008, pp. 995-8

Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, second edition of 1979, pp.9, 11, 23, 64

Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Central England*, 1986, pp. 172-3

Local Meeting Survey, by David Day, April 2016

Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record (HER 10340)

Part 2: The Meeting House & Burial Ground: history, contents, use, setting and designation

2.1 Historical background

The meeting house was registered in 1709 and, according to Stell, superseded one at Barrington, which lies two miles to the west. Quarries at Barrington were owned by the Strong family, which produced several generations of master masons who worked on the post-fire rebuilding of the City of London. One of these, Edward Strong (1652-1724) worked closely with Wren on the rebuilding of St Paul's Cathedral, for which he supplied a large quantity of Burford stone. Lidbetter (p. 9) suggests that Strong might have been the architect/designer of the meeting house, but the evidence for this is uncertain, and Lidbetter's suggestion that Strong retired here is incorrect; he retired to Hertfordshire (Colvin, p. 996).

The building was designed with an internal loft or gallery. Later changes (the list entry says c1730, Butler says the mid-eighteenth century) involved the creation of an attic room for women's business meetings, reached by a stair from the loft. The meeting house closed in 1854, although it continued to be used occasionally by Friends. In 1884 it was let to the Primitive Methodists, but returned to Quaker use for about twenty years around the turn of the twentieth century. In 1947 it was in use as a youth club, when the elders' stand was removed. Regular meetings for worship resumed in 1955, at which time the building was also listed for its special architectural and historical interest. A matchboard and corrugated iron porch described by Lidbetter was removed in the course of renovation in 1981, when a low extension was added at the west end (architect: Elizabeth Rowlands, information from Burford Friends).

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house (see plans at figure 1) was built in 1708-9, altered in c.1730 and extended in 1981. It is a tall, gabled structure built of coursed rubble, with a half-hipped Cotswold stone roof. The main entrance front is to the north, facing a small burial ground (photo upper left on page 1). This presents a symmetrical elevation with a central nail-studded door with strap hinges and heavy ashlar stop-chamfered surround. The entrance is flanked by tall sash windows (twelve panes over twelve, not nine over nine as drawn by Butler) in rebated surrounds. Inside, the wide ovolo-moulded glazing bars have square blocks at the intersections. The gable end towards the street (photo upper right on page 1) has a later glazing bar sash window to the attic, and evidence of a blocked window immediately below. The south elevation is plain, while the west elevation (photo middle left on page 1) also has a glazing bar sash window of mid-eighteenth-century character to the attic and immediately below this an original nine over nine sash in rebated surround with (like those on the north front) thick glazing bars with square blocks at the internal intersections. Below this, and

clearing the window, is the double hipped roof with central valley of the 1981 addition, a single-storey structure of complementary design and materials.

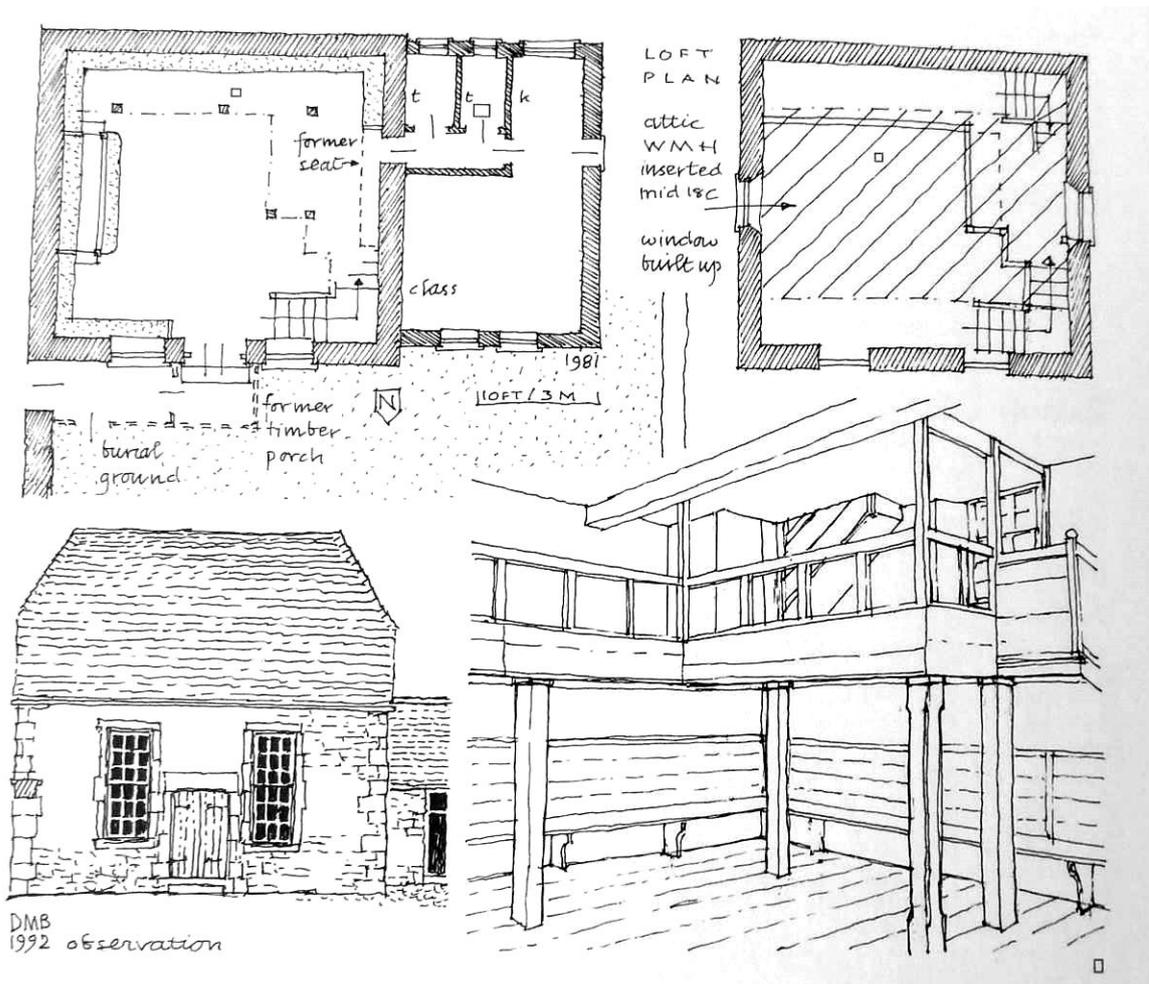


Figure 1: Plans, elevation and internal view, from Butler, Vol.2, p.496

The interior retains its historic character and atmosphere. It measures approximately 26ft (7.92m) x 24ft (7.3m), with a loft or gallery along the south and west sides, reached by a stair of two flights at the northwest corner. The gallery is supported on plain square posts, and the open gallery front is similarly plainly treated. Such plain detailing is difficult to date, but is assumed by most writers to be original. The ground floor space has a boarded floor and a high horizontal boarded dado with adze marks, rising on the east side at the back of the former stand, which was removed in 1947. At the west end a door connects to the WCs, kitchen and library/meeting space created in the addition of 1981. A further stair at the south west corner leads from the loft to the attic space, formed in c1730, with a substantial exposed collar purlin roof structure, evidently reused at least in part (photo bottom right on page 1). This space is lit by sash windows at either end.

2.3 Loose furnishings



Figure 2: Quaker artefacts displayed in the loft; note original glazing bar detail to window behind

The loose furnishings at ground floor are largely modern, but there are several open-backed benches in the loft, some with barley sugar supports to the arm rests. On the cill of the tall window in the west gable in the loft a number of Quaker artefacts are displayed, including two turned elm candlestick holders dating from 1709 (figure 2).

2.4 Attached burial ground

There is a small burial ground in front of the meeting house to the north, enclosed by a stone wall (the burial ground was extended in 1768, according to Butler). There is one complete headstone (George Rose, 1835-1905 and his wife Catherine, d.1921), relocated to the perimeter wall.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is in Pytt's Lane, a narrow lane to the east of Burford's High Street. Approached from the north the land rises, accentuating the tall proportions of the building's handsome north elevation and Cotswold stone roof. Surrounding historic buildings are also built of the local stone and enclosed by high walls. The wealthy medieval wool town retains its historic quality and character to a high degree, and the meeting house makes a good contribution to the local conservation area.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house fully merits its Grade II listed status. As a fine and relatively unaltered eighteenth-century meeting house with an unusual internal galleried arrangement and good

quality original stonework, carpentry and joinery, it may merit upgrading to II*. Confirmation of any association with Edward Strong would strengthen the case for upgrading.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

This has been the site of a meeting house and burial ground since the early eighteenth century, and the archaeological potential is likely to be high.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/generally satisfactory

3.2 Maintenance

The meeting house is well maintained. The most recent QIR (November 2015) has not been seen. The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building, and there is a five-year maintenance and repair plan.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. Measures undertaken to reduce environmental impact have included the installation of secondary glazing and some roof insulation. Further measures are to some extent constrained by the listed status and historic sensitivity of the building. Recycling arrangements are in place.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting considers that it has the amenities it needs; these include WCs and a kitchen/meeting room in the 1981 extension, as well as a newly-formed meeting room in the attic space (where numbers are limited to six on account of floor loadings). There is no resident warden.

The building is served by public transport, but the bus service is threatened, and is non-existent on Sundays. There is no car parking on site, but there is some street parking and a public car park is some 300m away. There is no secure storage provision for bicycles.

3.5 Access

The building is accessible to people with disabilities. There are steps at the main entrance, but wheelchair users are able to gain entrance via metal ramps to the 1981 addition. This is an inelegant solution, and it may be hoped that in time step-free access to the extension may be provided in a more permanent and well-detailed way. Inside the building there is an accessible WC and a hearing loop is provided.

3.6 Community Use

The building is used by Friends for approximately three hours a week. It is let to other groups for on average six hours a week; in management terms it is not easy to let two rooms separately. There is a lettings policy, and alcohol, drugs and gambling are not permitted. Users cite the good location, facilities and atmosphere of the building.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There are no recorded instances of heritage or other crime. This is a well-cared-for area with low levels of crime and deprivation.

3.8 Plans for change

None at present.

Part 4: Impact of Change

4.1 To what extent is the building amenable or vulnerable to change?

i) As a Meeting House used only by the local Meeting: The building has been adapted and upgraded to provide the necessary facilities, while taking account of its sensitive and important historic fabric and character. In addition to its historic character, the interior has a tranquil atmosphere which could easily be harmed by minor and incremental change. There is limited scope for further change internally, and the location in a conservation area also limits the scope for significant external alteration or further addition.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building is already in low-key community use, and this use could be extended, subject to the same constraints outlined above.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The building has historically been in and out of Quaker use, but not out of Quaker ownership. It would not lend itself easily to a permanent alternative use without harm to its special architectural and historical interest. In the regrettable event of closure, it would be desirable to investigate the possibility of its preservation as a community asset, possibly under the aegis of a building preservation trust.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List description

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1266442

Location: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, PYTT'S LANE

County: Oxfordshire

District: West Oxfordshire

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Burford

Grade: II

Date first listed: 12-Sep-1955

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 421463

BURFORD AND UPTON PYTT'S LANE AND SIGNET (West side) SP2512 (Enlargement)
Friends Meeting House. 7/187 12.9.55

GV II

Quaker Meeting House. 1709, altered c.1730. Coursed rubble, half-hipped Cotswold stone roof. 2 storeys; gable end to road with a glazing-bar sash window below the eaves. To North a nail-studded central door with strap-hinges and stop-chamfered surround. Flanked by tall windows in rebated surrounds, thick glazing-bar sash windows, internally with square blocks at the intersections. Blocked window in east gable. Similar window with rebated surround survives in west gable. Interior:- gallery to south and west sides (enlarged); attic room (inserted c1730) lit by end windows perhaps for Women Friends; lower walls lined with horizontal boarding, rising on east side at back of former stand. This Meeting House succeeded one at Barrington (2 miles away); was closed in 1854, reopened in early C20 for 20 odd years and now in use again since 1955. C.F. Stell: Non-Conformist Churches and Chapels (RCHM).

Listing NGR: SP2524112093